

Message Text

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SUBJ: PHOENIX PROGRAM - ANOTHER FALSE UPI REPORT

1. IN PARA 2 BELOW IS ONE OF THE MORE EXTRAORDINARY EXAMPLES OF UPI INVENTIVENESS IN PRODUCING JOURNALISTIC FICTION. FILED ON JANUARY 8 BY ROBERT KAYLOR, UPI BANGKOK, IT IS LIKELY TO PRODUCE CONGRESSIONAL AS WELL AS PRESS INQUIRIES. WE HAVE THEREFORE CONSIDERED IT USEFUL TO SET OUT THE FACTS (PARAS 3 THOROUGH 8) TO ENABLE THE DEPARTMENT TO DEAL WITH SUCH INQUIRIES.

2. BEGIN TEXT: "THE UNITED STATES IS STILL INVOLVED WITH THE SUCCESSOR TO THE ILL-FAMED PHOENIX PROGRAM THAT USED ASSASSINATION AND TERROR TACTICS AGAINST SUSPECTED VIET CONG IN THE LATE 1960'S, ACCORDING TO INFORMED US AND VIETNAMESE SOURCES.

"THE PROGRAM WAS PHASED OUT UNDER THE CODE NAME PHOENIX FOLLOWING CHARGES MANY OF THOSE KILLED WERE ACTUALLY INNOCENT CIVILIANS. IT HAS BEEN PLACED UNDER SOUTH VIETNAM'S NATIONAL POLICE UNDER THE NAME SPECIAL POLICE INVESTIGATING SERVICE (SPIS), THE SOURCES SAID.

"ACCORDING TO THE SOURCES, IT CONSISTS OF ABOUT 14,000 SPECIAL TROOPS WHOSE OPERATIONS ARE MONITORED ON A PART-TIME BASIS BY US CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (CIA) OPERATIVES IN SAIGON AND IN PROVINCIAL CAPITALS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

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"THE UNITED STATES ALSO PROVIDES DATA PROCESSING FACILITIES FOR SPIS THROUGH A CONTRACTOR, COMPUTER SCIENCES SERVICES, INC., THE SOURCES SAID. THEY SAID THE COMPANY RUNS INTELLIGENCE REPORTS THROUGH ITS MACHINES TO CLASSIFY AND COLLATE THEM AND THE TURNS THE MATERIAL OVER TO SPIS.

"THE PROGRAM THAT WAS EVENTUALLY NAMED PHOENIX WAS SET UP IN VIETNAM IN 1967 BY WILLIAM E. COLBY, WHO NOW HEADS THE CIA. DESIGNED AS A COORDINATED DRIVE AGAINST THE VIET CONG'S SHADOW GOVERNMENT SYSTEM BY VIETNAMESE AND AMERICAN FORCES, IT WAS CONTROLLED BY THE UNITED STATES AND 1,2000 AMERICAN CIVILIAN AND MILITARY PERSONNEL WERE INVOLVED IN IT AT THE HEIGHT OF THE WAR.

"PHOENIX CAME UNDER ATTACK IN 1971 BECAUSE OF A SYSTEM OF QUOTAS WHICH ASSIGNED PROVINCIAL COMMITTEES A SPECIFIED NUMBER OF VIET CONG "NEUTRALIZATIONS" EACH MONTH. CRITICS CHARGED THAT INNOCENT VICTIMS WERE KILLED TO FILL QUOTAS, AND THAT SOME VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS AND AGENTS ALSO USED THE SYSTEM TO SETTLE PERSONAL GRUDGES.

"COLBY TESTIFIED BEFORE A CONGRESSIONAL SUBCOMMITTEE THAT TARGETS WERE KILLED ONLY WHEN THEY RESISTED ARREST. HE SUPPLIED FIGURES SHOWING THAT 20,587 VIET CONG SUSPECTS WERE KILLED UNDER THE PROGRAM FROM 1968 TO (GARBLE) VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS HAVE SAID TWICE THAT NUMBER WERE KILLED IN THE SAME PERIOD.

"CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE PROGRAM UNDER ANOTHER NAME CAME TO LIGHT WITH AN OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT IN DECEMBER THAT ONE PROVINCIAL COMMITTEE HAD REPORTED FULFILLING 135 PER CENT OF ITS QUOTA OF NEUTRALIZATIONS FOR THE YEAR.

"SAIGON GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS DECLINED TO COMMENT FURTHER ON THE ANNOUNCEMENT OR PROVIDE FIGURES FOR THE REST OF THE COUNTRY, CITING GROUNDS OF "NATIONAL SECURITY".

"ACCORDING TO SOURCES HERE, ABOUT 100 AMERICAN PERSONNEL ARE NOW INVOLVED IN MONITORING THE PROGRAM. THEY SAID THAT OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR WATCHING IT RESTS WITH A US AIR FORCE OFFICER ON DETACHED DUTY WITH THE AMERICAN EMBASSY IN SAIGON.

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"SOME US SOURCES SAID THAT THE NUMBER OF OPERATIONS BY SPIS HAVE BEEN DRASTICALLY REDUCED AND THAT THE PROGRAM HAS LARGELY LOST ITS EFFECTIVENESS. THEY SAY THAT BECAUSE SPIS PERSONNEL ARE EXEMPT FROM MILITARY SERVICE, IT HAS BECOME A REPOSITORY FOR DRAFT DODGERS AND YOUTHS SEEKING TO AVOID THE ARMY." END TEXT

3. THE STORY IS, OF COURSE, COMPLETELY FALSE. THE FACTS ARE

AS FOLLOWS:

4. THE STATEMENT THAT THE "UNITED STATES IS STILL INVOLVED WITH THE SUCCESSOR TO THE ILL-FAMED PHOENIX PROGRAM" IS SIMPLY NOT TRUE. NO ELEMENT OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT IS INVOLVED IN ANY WAY WITH ANY PROGRAM IN VIETNAM OF ANY SUCH DESCRIPTION.

5. CONTRARY TO WHAT THE ARTICLE CLAIMS, THERE IS NO "SPECIAL POLICE INVESTIGATING SERVICE" (SPIS) IN VIETNAM. THERE IS, OF COURSE, A SPECIAL BRANCH OF THE NATIONAL POLICE COMMAND, CONCERNED WITH SECURITY AND COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE MATTERS, WHICH WAS ORGANIZED ON BRITISH LINES AND IS SIMILAR TO ORGANIZATIONS EXISTING IN MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE, AND MANY OTHER (INCLUDING WESTERN EUROPEAN) COUNTRIES. THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT HAS NO ADVISORY RELATIONSHIPS TO THIS ORGANIZATION WHATSOEVER. THUS, THE STATEMENT THAT THE SO-CALLED SPIS "CONSISTS OF ABOUT 14,000 SPECIAL TROOPS WHOSE OPERATIONS ARE MONITORED ON A PART-TIME BASIS BY US CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (CIA) OPERATIVES IN SAIGON AND PROVINCE CAPITALS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY" HAS ABSOLUTELY NO RELATIONSHIP TO THE TRUTH.

6. THERE IS NO "US AIR FORCE OFFICER ON DETACHED DUTY WITH THE AMERICAN EMBASSY IN SAIGON." THERE IS NO OFFICER OF ANY KIND IN THE EMBASSY WITH ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR MONITORING ANY SUCH PROGRAM AS DESCRIBED IN THE ARTICLE.

7. WHILE THERE IS NO REASON FOR THE UNITED STATES EMBASSY TO COMMENT ON THE PHOENIX PROGRAM, IT MAY BE WORTH NOTING THAT THE PROGRAM ALREADY EXISTED WHEN MR. COLBY ARRIVED IN VIETNAM. HE DID NOT SET IT UP. THIS IS BY WAY OF COMMENTING ON THE GENERAL RELIABILITY OF THE STORY.

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IM THERE IS A "COMPUTER SCIENCES CORPORATION" WHICH MAY BE MEANT BY THE "COMPUTER SCIENCES SERVICES, INC." MENTIONED IN THE ARTICLE. A PREVIOUS US FUNDED CONTRACT BETWEEN COMPUTER SCIENCES AND THE NATIONAL POLICE WAS TERMINATED AS OF APRIL 1974 AND A CONTRACT WITH USAID WAS TERMINATED IN JUNE 1974. IN ANY CASE, THAT CONTRACT HAD NO RELATIONSHIP WHATEVER TO ANYTHING THAT COULD BE DESCRIBED AS THE PHOENIX PROGRAM.

9. AT THE PRESENT TIME, COMPUTER SCIENCES HAS A COMMERCIAL CONTRACT WITH THE VIETNAMESE NATIONAL POLICE IN LOGISTICS AND PERSONAL (PAYROLLING, ETC.) BUT IS ALSO UNINVOLVED IN ANY COUNTERINSURGENCY OR OTHER OPERATIONAL MATTERS. THE PRESENT CONTRACT IS NOT FUNDED BY ANY ELEMENT OF THE USG.

10. THIS SORT OF REPORTING IS THE KIND OF SENSATIONAL STORY,

TOTALLY UNRELATED TO THE FACTS, WHICH WE HAVE COME TO EXPECT FROM UPI WHICH HAS IN RECENT MONTHS PRODUCED A STEADY STREAM OF MANUFACTURED FALSEHOODS ON VIETNAM AND VIETNAM RELATED SUBJECTS. ANOTHER RECENT EXAMPLE WAS THE UPI STORY DATED SAIGON ON THE SAILING OF THE ENTERPRISE (REFTEL 0211).

11. IT SEEMS TO US THAT THE SITUATION HAS REACHED A POINT AT WHICH DEPARTMENT SHOULD CONSIDER AN APPROACH TO UPI AT A SENIOR RESPONSIBLE LEVEL IN ATTEMPT INJECT SOME SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY IN REPORTING ON VIETNAMESE MATTERS.
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